News Release
Communiqué

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Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Ministère de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée

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MCGUINTY GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES FIRST COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING PROGRAM OF ITS KIND IN CANADA

$193.5 Million Investment Promotes Early Detection To Save Lives

TORONTO – The McGuinty government is launching Canada's first province-wide screening program to provide early detection of colorectal cancer and help save the lives of Ontarians who may be at risk, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman announced today.

"Colorectal cancer is the second deadliest form of cancer in Canada but it is preventable," said Smitherman. "If detected in its early stages, there is a 90 per cent chance it can be treated and cured. That's why our government is increasing access to screening tests to help save lives."

In 2006, an estimated 7,500 Ontarians were diagnosed with colorectal cancer. In the same year, 3,100 died from the disease. Currently, only one out of five Ontarians age 50 and over are screened for colorectal cancer by any method.

The Ontario government is investing $193.5 million over the next five years to implement and expand the program to increase access to colorectal cancer screening for Ontarians aged 50 years or older. Experts recommend that all people aged 50 years and older should be screened for colorectal cancer.

Individuals aged 50 and over who are at average risk – having no family history of colorectal cancer or symptoms – will have access to an easy-to-use at home screening kit called the fecal occult blood test (FOBT). FOBT kits will be available through physicians' offices, walk-in clinics, and community health centres. As the program expands, the kits will also be available at participating pharmacies.

The program – developed in collaboration with Cancer Care Ontario, the provincial agency that co-ordinates Ontario's cancer services and prevention programs – will also increase access to colonoscopies, a procedure that examines the rectum and colon for polyps that might be cancerous. Individuals who have a positive FOBT test as well as those who are at an increased risk of developing colorectal cancer because they have a family history of this disease will continue to be referred for a colonoscopy.

Other components of the program include:

- A single laboratory to handle the processing of all fecal occult blood tests to ensure consistent quality standards and streamlined results
- The creation of a registry to send reminders about screening, assist in result and follow-up notification for individuals without access to primary care providers, and provide an evaluation tool to track overall program progress
- A comprehensive five-year public education campaign to educate the public and health care

providers on the benefits of colorectal screening and early detection

"Ontario's colorectal cancer screening program will enable us to detect colorectal cancer much earlier when treatment is most effective," said Cancer Care Ontario President Terry Sullivan. "The colorectal cancer screening program joins the Smoke Free Ontario Act as one of the most important policies in Ontario's history to reduce suffering and death from cancer."

"As first-line health professionals, family physicians play a central role in preventing and detecting diseases," said Dr. Sandy Buchman, President, Ontario College of Family Physicians. "The Ontario College of Family Physicians is pleased to work with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and Cancer Care Ontario on a program that will make a major difference to the health and well-being of the people of Ontario."

This is just the latest example of the McGuinty governments' commitment to fighting cancer. Other initiatives include:

- Investing $152.1 million to fund 19 cancer fighting drugs, including Velcade and Herceptin
- Investing $44.5 million in new or expanded programs at six regional cancer centres (Mississauga, Oshawa, Kitchener-Waterloo, Hamilton, Sudbury and Thunder Bay).
- Reducing radiation wait times by 33 per cent over the last three years
- Investing in nine new or expanded regional cancer centres over the last three years

Today's initiative is part of the McGuinty government's plan for innovation in public health care, building a system that delivers on three priorities – keeping Ontarians healthy, reducing wait times and providing better access to doctors and nurses

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January 23, 2007

ONTARIO'S COLORECTAL CANCER SCREENING PROGRAM

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care is launching a population-based colorectal cancer screening program - the first of its kind in Canada - to increase screening rates and decrease colorectal cancer-related deaths in Ontario.

The screening program will be rolled out over a period of five years and will put into practice recommendations for screening made by Cancer Care Ontario, the Canadian Cancer Society, and the Canadian Task Force on Preventive Health Care.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

In collaboration with Cancer Care Ontario, the program will encourage screening and reduce colorectal cancer related deaths. When the program is fully implemented, it will involve the following components:

- A comprehensive public awareness campaign to educate the public and health care providers on the benefits of colorectal screening and early detection
- Increased access to screening by making fecal occult blood test (FOBT) kits widely available through physicians' offices, walk-in clinics, pharmacies and by calling Telehealth Ontario
- A single laboratory to handle the processing of all FOBT kits to ensure consistent quality standards and streamlined results
- The creation of a registry to send reminders about screening, assist in result and follow-up notification for individuals without access to primary care providers, and provide an evaluation tool to track overall program progress
- Increased funding for additional colonoscopies within the system. The program could increase the number of colonoscopies performed in the province by more than 100,000 over the next five years

COLORECTAL SCREENING PROGRAM

Here are examples of how the program would work:

Average risk individual aged 50 years and older with a regular health care provider:

- Pick up a FOBT kit from their health care provider, take home the test, complete it, and mail it to the central laboratory free of charge
- The laboratory would process the test and send results to the central registry and primary care provider
- If the result is positive, the primary care provider would notify the individual and arrange for follow up with colonoscopy
- If the result is negative, the individual would simply be notified by the central registry and would

receive a reminder to repeat the FOBT in two years time

Average risk individual aged 50 years and older without a regular health care provider:

- Individual without primary care providers would pick up a kit at a local pharmacy or order the kit through Telehealth Ontario
- Individual would take home the test, complete it, and mail it to the central laboratory free of charge
- The laboratory would process the test and send results to the central registry
- If the result is positive, the central registry would notify the individual and arrange for follow up with colonoscopy
- If the result is negative, the individual would simply be notified by the central registry and would receive a reminder to repeat the FOBT in two years' time

Increased risk individuals:

- Individual with a family history of colorectal cancer speaks to their primary care provider about screening.
- After speaking with their primary care provider, the individual would generally be directed to receive a colonoscopy. The result of the colonoscopy would be sent to the specialist, primary care physician, and to the Cancer Care Ontario information system
- If the individual is diagnosed with colorectal cancer, they would receive treatment
- If the individual has no polyps, they would receive a reminder for a colonoscopy every ten years. If the individual has polyps that were removed, they would receive a colonoscopy every five years.

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